The last Speech of Thomas Wentworth, late Earle of Strafford, to the Lords and Gentlemen in the Tower, who accompanied him to the place of Execution, with his last Speech on the Scaffold, *May* the 12th 1641.

This is false, for the Bp. of Armagh, who was with him in Towr, testifyd that he made no speech, at all in Towr,

LONDON:

B

YALE U. L. SEP 23 '91

His ſpeech in the Tower to the Lords, before he went to execution.

RIght Honourable, and the reſt, you are now come to convey mee to my death, I am willing to dye, which is a thing no more than all our Predeceſſors have done, and a debt that our Poſteritie muſt in their due time diſcharge, which ſince it can be no way avoyded, it ought the leſſe to be feared; for that which is common to all, ought not to be intollerable to any: It is the Law of Nature, the tribute of the fleſh, a remedy from all worldly cares and troubles; and to the truly penitent, a perfect path to bleſſedneſſe. And there is but one death, though ſeverall wayes unto it: mine is not naturall, but enforced by the Law and Juſtice: it hath beene ſayd that the Lawes vex only the meaner ſort of people, but the mightie are able to withſtand them: it is not ſo with me, for to the Law I ſubmit my ſelfe, and confeſſe that I receive nothing but juſtice: for hee that politikely intendeth good to a Common-weale, may be called a juſt man, but hee that practiſeth either for his owne profit, or any other ſiniſter ends, may be well termed a delinquent perſon; neither is delay in puniſhment any privilege for pardon. And moreover, I ingenuouſly confeſſe with *Cicero*, That the death of the bad is the ſafetie of the good that be alive.

Let no man truſt eyther in the favour of his Prince, the friendſhip and conſanguinity of his Peeres, muchleſſe in his owne wiſdome and knowledge, of which I ingennouſly confeſſe I have beene too confident. Kings, as they are men before God, ſo they are Gods before men, and I may ſay with a great man once in this Kingdome, *Had I ſtrived to obey my*

God

God as faithfully, as I ſought to honour my King fraudulently, I had ſtood, and not fallen. Moſt happie and fortunate is that Prince, who is as much for his juſtice feared, as for his goodneſſe beloved: For the greater that Princes are in power above other, the more they ought in vertue to excell other; and ſuch is the royall Soveraigne whom I late ſerved.

For my Peeres, the correſpondence that I had with them during my proſperitie, was to mee very delightfull and pleaſing, and here they have commiſerated my ruine, I have plentifully found, who (for the moſt generous of them) I may boldly ſay, though they have deteſted the fact, yet they have pitied the perſon delinquent; the firſt in their loyaltie, the laſt in their charitie: ingenuouſly confeſſing, that never any ſubject, or peere of my rank, had ever that help of Counſell, that benefit of time, or a more free and legall tryall than I have had: of the like to which, none of my preceſſors hath had ſo much favour from his prince, ſo much ſufferance from the people; in which I comprehend the underſtanding Commons, not the many headed monſter, Multitude: But I have offended, am ſentenced, and muſt now ſuffer me.

And for my too much confidence in my ſuppoſed wiſdom and knowledge, therein have beene the moſt deceived: For hee that is wiſe to himſelfe, and knowes by others faults to correct his owne offences, to be truly wiſe is to be Secretaries to our ſelves; for it is meere folly to reveale and intimate thoughts to ſtrangers: wiſdome is the moſt precious Gem with which the mind can be adorned, and learning the moſt famous thing for which a man ought to bee eſteemed, and true wiſdome teacheth us to doe well, as to ſpeake well: in the firſt I have failed, for *the wiſdome of man is fooliſhneſſe with God.*

For knowledge, it is a thing indifferent both to good and evill but the beſt knowledge is for a man to know himſelfe; hee that doth ſo ſhall eſteeme of himſelfe but little, for hee conſidereth from whence he came, and whereto he muſt, hee

regardeth not the vaine pleaſures of this life, hee exalteth God, and ſtrives to live in his feare ; but he that knoweth not himſelfe is wilfull in his owne wayes, unprofitable in his life, unfortunate in his death, and ſo am I. But the reaſon why I ſought to attaine unto it was this: I have read that he that knoweth not that which he ought to know, is a Bruit beaſt amongſt men: hee that knoweth more than hee ought to know, is a man amongſt beaſts: but hee that knoweth all that may be knowne, is a God amongſt men. To this I much aſpired, in this I much failed; *Vanitie of vanities, all is but vanitie.*

I have heard the people clamour and cry out, ſaying, That through my occaſion the times are bad, I wiſh that when I am dead they may prove better: moſt true it is, that there is at this time a great ſtorme impending (God in his mercie avert it.) And ſince it is my particular lot, like *Jonah*, to bee caſt into the ſea, I ſhall think my life well ſpent, to appeaſe Gods wrath, and ſatisfie the peoples malice.

O what is eloquence more than aire? faſhioned with an articulate and diſtinct ſound, when it is a ſpeciall vertue to ſpeake little and well, and ſilence is oft the beſt oratorie; for fooles in their dumbneſſe may bee accounted wiſe: It hath power to make a good matter ſeeme bad, and a bad cauſe appeare good: but mine was to me unprofitable, and like the the Cypreſſe trees, which are great and tall, but altogether without fruit.

What is honour? but the firſt ſtep to diſquietneſſe, and power is ſtill waited on by envie, neither hath it any privilege againſt infamie. It is held to be the chiefe part of honor, for a man to joyne to his office and calling, curteſie and affabilitie, commiſeration and pitie: for thereby he draweth to him with a kind of compulſion, the hearts of the multitude. But that was the leaſt part of my ſtudy, which now makes me call to mind, that the greater the perſons are in authority, the ſooner they are catcht in any delinquencie, and their

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ſmalleſt crimes are ſtriven to bee made capitall, the ſmalleſt ſpot ſeemes great in the finneſt linnen, and the leaſt flaw is ſooneſt found in the richeſt Diamond. But high and noble ſpirits finding themſelves wounded, grieve not ſo much at their owne paine and perplexitie, as at the deriding and ſcoffing of their enemy: but for mine owne part, though I might have many in my life, I hope to finde none in my death.

Amongſt other things which pollute and contaminate the mindes of great ſpirits, there is none more heinons than Ambition, which is ſeldome unaccompanyed without Avarice: Such, to poſſeſſe their ends, care not to violate the Lawes of Religion, and Reaſon, and to breake the bonds of Modeſty and equity, with the neareſt tyes of Conſanguinity, and Amity; of which as I have beene guilty, ſo I crave at Gods hands forgiveneſſe. It is a Maxime in Philoſophy, that ambitious men can bee never good Counſellours to Princes; the deſire of having more is common to great Lords, and a deſire of Rule a great cauſe of their Ruine.

My Lords, I am now the hopeleſſe Preſident, may I bee to you all an happy example: For Ambition devoureth gold, and drinketh bloud, and climbeth ſo high by other mens heads, that at the length in the fall it breaketh its own neck: therefore it is better to live in humble content, than in high care and trouble: For more precious is want with honeſty, than wealth with infamy: For what are wee but meere vapours, which in a ſerene Element aſcend high, and upon an inſtant, like Smoak, vaniſh into nothing: or like Ships without Pilots, toſt up and downe upon the Seas by contrary winds and tempeſts. But the good husbandman thinks better of thoſe eares of Corne, which bow downe, and grow crooked, than thoſe which are ſtreight and upright, becauſe he is aſſured to finde more ſtore of graine in the one than in the other. This all men know, yet of this, how few make uſe: The defect whereof muſt be now my paine: may my ſuffering prove to others profit.

For what hath now the favour of my Prince, the familiarity with my Peeres, the volubility of a tongue, the ſtrength of my memory, my learning, or knowledge, my honours, or Offices, my power, and potency, my riches, and treaſure, (all theſe the eſpeciall gifts, both of Nature, and Fortune) what have all theſe profited mee? Bleſſings I acknowledge, though by God beſtowed upon man; yet not all of them together upon many: yet by the Divine providence, the moſt of them met in me: of which had I made happy uſe, I might ſtill have flouriſht, who now am forc'd immaturely to fall.

I now could wiſh, (but that *utinam* is too late) that God with his outward goodneſſe towards mee had ſo commixed his inward grace, that I had chuſed the *medium* path, neither inclining to the right hand, nor deviating to the left; but like *Icarus* with my waxen wings, fearing by too low a flight to moyſten them with the Waves: I ſoared too high, and too neare the Sunne, by which they being melted; I aymming at the higheſt, am precipitated to the loweſt: and am made a wretched prey to the Waters: But I who before built my houſe upon the the ſand, have now ſetled my hopes upon the Rock my Saviour: by whoſe onely merits my ſole truſt is, that whatſoever becomes of my body, yet in this boſome my ſoule may be Sanctuaried.

Nimrod would have built a Tower to reach up to heaven, and cald it *Babel*; but God turned it to the confuſion of Languages, and diſſipation of the people. *Pharaoh* kept the Children of *Iſrael* in bondage, and after having freed them, in his great pride would have made them his prey; but God gave them a drie and miraculous paſſage, and *Pharaoh* and his hoaſt a watrie Sepulcher. *Belſhazzer* feaſted his Princes and Proſtitutes, who drunke healths in the Veſſells taken from the Temple, but the hand of God writ upon the wall, *Mene, Tekel, Phoras*, and that night before morning was both his Kingdome and life taken from him: Thus God lets

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men goe on a great while in their owne devices, but in the end it prove their owne ruine and deſtruction, never ſuffering them to effect their deſired purpoſes: therefore let none preſume upon his power, glory in his greatneſſe, or bee too confident in his riches: Theſe things were written for our Inſtruction, of which the living may make uſe, the dying cannot; but wit and unfruitfull wiſedome are the next neighbours to folly.

There can bee no greater vanity in the world, than to eſteeme the world, which regardeth no man; and to make ſlight account of God who greatly reſpecteth all men; and there can bee no greater folly in man, than by much Travell to increaſe his goods, and pamper his body, and in the interim with vaine delights and pleaſures, to loſe his ſoule. It is a great folly in any man to attempt a bad beginning, in hope of a good ending; and to make that proper to one, which was before common to all, is meere indiſcretion, and the beginning of diſcord, which I poſitively wiſh may end in this my puniſhment.

O how ſmall a proportion of earth will containe my body, when my high minde could not be confined within the ſpacious compaſſe of two Kingdomes? But my houre draweth on, and I conclude with the Pſalmiſt, not ayming at any one man in particular, but ſpeaking for all in generall: *How long will you Judges bee corrupted? how long will yee ceaſe to give true Iudgement? &c. Bleſſed is the man that doth not walke in the Councell of the wicked, nor ſtand in the way of ſinners, nor ſit in the ſeat of the ſcornfull, therefore they ſhall not ſtand in the Iudgement, nor ſinners in the aſſembly of the righteous, &c.*

About the houre of 12. a Clocke the aforeſaid Lord of *Strafford* was conveyed to the Scaffold on Tower-Hill, where was a Court of Guard made by the ſeverall Companies of Souldiers of the City of *London*, and the Hamlets of the Tower on each ſide as he paſſed to the Scaffold: before marched

ched the Marſhalls men to make way, then the Sheriffes of Londons Officers with their Halberds; after them the Kings Guard, or warders of the Tower: Next came one of his Gentlemen, bare headed, in mourning Habit, the Lord *Strafford* following him clad in blacke cloath, with divers others in the ſame habit, which were his attendance; then the Lord Biſhop of *Armagh*, and other good Divines; with the Sheriffes of London, and divers honourable parſonages.

When he came to the Scaffold, he there ſhewed himſelfe on each ſide in full view to all people, and made this ſhort ſpeech, with as much alacrity of Spirit, as a mortall man could expreſſe, *viz.*

I am now come to pay a debt for ſin which is death, & due to al; *For the wages of ſin is death*; what I have done, for which I now muſt ſuffer death, was by errour, not with my reall intentions, which Law I was ignorant of, and now juſtly condemned; for which I pray God forgive me: for as I hope for mercy I did thinke it ever beſt by way of Parliament to purge the Corruption of the Times, and to keep the King and his people in unity. I have found a great deale of favour from his Majeſty: and I pray God Almighty bleſſe him, and his royall poſterity, and ſhew him favour and mercy in the time of his neceſſity: My Lord of Armagh, you are the man that hath adminiſtred comfort unto me in all my afflictions, you have not left viſiting me ſince Sunday; you have adminiſtred unto me a deale of comfort, which otherwiſe I might have runne into by my affliction: I do here forgive all men, not onely outwardly with my tongue, but alſo inwardly with my heart, as I doe hope for mercy at the hand of my Redeemer, I dye a Proteſtant, in which faith I was Baptized in, for I ever hated the *Romiſh* Religion, & to my knowledge none durſt attempt it otherwiſe, ſince the time of mine age of 21. yeares, being now 49. Then hee laid himſelfe on the Block, and prayed earneſtly, ſaying to the Executioner, when I ſtretch forth my hands then performe thy office, for I forgive thee: So. *Lord Jeſus receive me into thy boſome of mercy.*